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Gaullist Shifts Story On Ben Barka Case

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By Waverley Post
Washington Post Foreign Service

PARIS, Jan. 25—Gaullist "Reda Guedira, former Deputy Pierre Lemarchand reversed his previous denials today and admitted he had seen Georges Figon after the kidnaping of Mehdi Ben Barka on Oct. 29.

Figon was apparently the key man in the abduction of the Moroccan opposition leader, who is believed to have been murdered. French police found Figon dead of a bullet wound Jan. 17 and pronounced it suicide, a verdict widely doubted here.

Lemarchand denied stoutly for almost three months that he had seen Figon after the kidnaping. He reversed himself under the skillful questioning of Judge Louis Zollinger but still denied that he had seen Figon before the crime. Figon had claimed Lemarchand was the "higher-up" who guaranteed him immunity in the kidnaping. Lemarchand had acted as Figon's lawyer in the past.

Lemarchand's role is an important issue for France, because he headed the extra-legal police who combatted the Secret Army Organization of French terrorists during the Algerian war. He has been suspected of involvement in similar activities since — for instance, the kidnaping in Germany of Col. Antoine Argoud, the Secret Army leader, which resembled the Ben Barka kidnaping.

If participation in the Ben Barka affair is definitely pinned on Lemarchand, it will ed experts from services not hit the government in one of its most sensitive spots—its cladding from the coroner's re-employment of clandestine police forces born of the Algerian war.

The weekly Express noted yesterday that Figon's "suicide" resembled that of another criminal suspected—like

Lemarchand and Figon — of having been involved in the Argoud kidnaping. He was found by police with a bullet hole in his right temple and declared a suicide, even though he was left-handed. Figon was buried yesterday with Catholic rites usually denied to a suicide.

L'Express carried Figon's interview claiming he saw Ben Barka murdered. Jean Marvier of L'Express gave Zollinger today the names of four persons who heard Figon tape-record his confession. Marvier said the transcript of the recording was typed by Edward Behr, a British journalist working for Newsweek magazine.

A campaign seems to be underway to involve the CIA in the Ben Barka case. The evidence is fuzzy, but the highly reliable (and pro-American) Figaro asked why Philippe Berrier, a journalist who helped bring Ben Barka to Paris, has not been questioned since his arrest Nov. 26—in terms implying he was "not unknown" to the CIA.

The illustrated weekly Match published an interview attributed to an anonymous former officer of the French counter-espionage services, one of the police forces most thoroughly compromised in the case. He said that Oufkir had promised \$100,000 for the delivery of Ben Barka, which he couldn't scrape together, and implied that the CIA had provided part of the money. (Express put the sum at \$40,000; Lemarchand today said it was \$250,000.)

[A leftist rally of 10,000 persons tonight called on President de Gaulle to resign because of the scandal. Francois Mitterrand, who lost the runoff presidential election to de Gaulle last month, was the main speaker, Reuters reported.]